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The right to development

Report of the Secretary-General**

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** In accordance with General Assembly resolution 54/248, section C, paragraph 1, this report is being submitted on 31 July 2001 so as to include as much updated information as possible.

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I. Introduction

1. By its resolution 55/108 of 4 December 2000, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session and to the Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-seventh session a comprehensive report on the implementation of the various provisions of that resolution.

2. In response to the resolution, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights sent a note verbale, dated 30 April 2001, to States soliciting information to be compiled in the report. As at 12 July 2001, replies had been received from Argentina, Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Guatemala and Mexico. The responses are compiled in the present report.

II. Replies received from Governments

A. Argentina

[Original: Spanish]
[12 July 2001]

3. A response to the note verbale was received by the Secretariat on 12 July 2001. Given the date of the response, the relative length of the submission, and the lack of time available for an official translation of the response, a summary is reproduced below. A full copy of the response is available from the Secretariat.

4. The submission from Argentina presents statistics and other material on poverty, indigenous peoples, racial discrimination, and the incorporation of a gender perspective in development. On poverty, the Government notes figures from the 1991 census that demonstrate that 19.9 per cent of the population lives without a sufficient level of basic needs, 44 per cent of whom are below 15 years of age; 5.4 per cent of the population of Buenos Aires lives in extreme poverty. These figures improved until 1994, but the financial crisis in Mexico had negative consequences on poverty levels in Argentina. Thus by 1996, 27.9 per cent of the population was living in poverty; however, by 1998, that figure had diminished to 17.7 per cent.

5. The reform of the National Constitution in 1994, which includes articles concerning the protection of the human rights of indigenous peoples, constitutes a significant advance in the promotion of cultural and ethnic diversity in the nation. Those rights concern historical, cultural and ethnic identity, the juridical identity of indigenous communities, communal possession of traditional lands, bilingual and intercultural education, the preservation of indigenous heritage, measures to promote human development and participation in the management of their natural resources.

6. Argentina has established a National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism, a decentralized body within the framework of the Ministry of the Interior. The Institute elaborates national policies to fight discrimination, xenophobia and racism. Some of its activities include applying laws relating to compensation to victims for acts of racism, maintaining information on international laws concerning racism, and the receipt and centralization of complaints concerning racist conduct.

7. The response of Argentina attaches particular emphasis in promoting women's right to development through combating discrimination. Generally, the legal order does not sanction discrimination that would have a negative impact on the full enjoyment of the human rights of women, and the equality of men and women is guaranteed under the Constitution. The Government is committed to eliminating progressively all forms of discrimination against women. By 2000, 28 per cent of parliamentarians in the National Congress were women. However, the number of women in the Senate has decreased from 3 in 1985 to 2 in 2000 out of a total of 59 seats. Currently, there is one woman Minister and there are three women Departmental Secretaries and five women Sub-Secretaries. In the judiciary, 20 per cent of magistrates are women and 18.6 per cent of judges at first instance are women. Of the nine members of the national Supreme Court, none were women. In the armed forces, 10.4 per cent are women. Women represent between 3 and 6 per cent of corporate directors. In the workforce in 1999, 41.6 per cent were women as compared with 36 per cent in 1987. In the workplace, women with the same level of education generally receive a lower salary than men. In education, significant advances have been made in women's participation in formal education. Women represent 49.4 per cent of primary school children and 53 per cent of high school students. Of higher education students (non-University), 73.51 per cent are

women while 57 per cent of university students are women.

B. Cuba

[Original: Spanish]
[22 June 2001]

8. The Government of the Republic of Cuba welcomes the holding of the two sessions of the Open-ended Working Group on the Right to Development, which focused on specific issues reflected in the report of the Working Group (E/CN.4/2001/26), and stresses the need to continue deliberations on the right to development in all its aspects.

9. At the same time, it regrets the limited progress made in fulfilment of the mandate of the Open-ended Working Group established by the Commission on Human Rights to facilitate the implementation of the 1986 Declaration on the Right to Development (General Assembly resolution 41/128, annex).

10. Cuba believes that the lack of political will on the part of a significant number of developed countries and their decision to protect the unjust foundations of the current international economic order have been the determining factors in the lack of concrete progress in the work of the Group.

11. Cuba takes this opportunity to denounce the unacceptable practices of a group of industrialized countries, which resort to blackmail and manipulation of development assistance in order to silence and neutralize the legitimate claims to the right to development of three quarters of the world's population.

12. The same countries, with their inflexible and obstructionist positions, blocked the progress of the Working Group before the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on Human Rights and made efforts during the session to work against the historic consensus achieved in Vienna regarding the right to development.

13. Even though the right to development as set out in the 1986 Declaration was reaffirmed in the 1993 Vienna Declaration as a universal and inalienable right and an integral part of all fundamental human rights, several industrialized countries are now attempting to question and reformulate its content and scope, including the definition of the beneficiaries of the right.

14. Under the 1986 Declaration, the right to development is a right both of individuals and of peoples, and both national Governments and the international community have responsibility for ensuring its full enjoyment.

15. International cooperation in the realization of the right to development is an inherent right of the peoples of the South. It is an ethical imperative for the international community to halt and reverse the tendency towards marginalization of some countries and to promote their early enjoyment of the benefits of globalization and interdependence.

16. For the full realization of the right to development, it is necessary to establish an international economic order based on participation in the decision-making process on the basis of equality, interdependence, mutual interest and cooperation by all States, along with solidarity. As a result, all peoples and nations can expect international aid in their efforts to exercise the right to development, in particular to eradicate poverty, illiteracy and hunger and to deal with the aftermath of emergency situations such as natural disasters.

17. In the opinion of the Government of the Republic of Cuba, numerous obstacles and dangers, which have an impact at both the national and international levels, lie ahead for the effective application of the Declaration on the Right to Development and the full realization of this right.

18. The obstacles at the national level include:

(a) Lack of political will among some Governments to meet the needs of significant sectors of the population which have been marginalized and condemned to poverty;

(b) Limitations on and failure to allocate sufficient resources for policies and programmes designed to train and empower human capital and the necessary physical infrastructure for development;

(c) Unequal distribution of wealth and property within countries;

(d) Inadequate participation by the people in decision-making mechanisms for major political, economic and social processes at the national level;

(e) Limited capacity of States to act as economic agents and to redistribute national wealth as a result of privatization and restructuring of public

organizations imposed by neo-liberal policies. This question is particularly relevant to the supply of basic services on the part of the State.

19. Obstacles at the international level include:

(a) Outflow of capital from South countries as a result of external debt and its servicing;

(b) Greater inequalities in terms of trade in goods between developed and developing countries. Commodity prices have fallen to rock bottom. The South countries which are net importers of fuel have over the past year faced an increase in oil prices, aggravating their difficult situation;

(c) Unequal distribution of the benefits resulting from globalization and economic interdependence, which have not reached all countries, communities and individuals. These benefits are increasingly beyond the reach of some countries, the least developed and African countries in particular;

(d) Predatory actions by the large transnational companies which monopolize the principal international markets and impose their prices, and which have been virtually exempt from payment of taxes of any kind, as a result of the fierce competition imposed by neo-liberal globalization;

(e) Inadequacy of measures to reduce the ever-increasing gap between developed and developing countries, which has a negative impact on the full enjoyment of human rights, especially in developing countries;

(f) Continuing decrease in official development assistance and increase in the conditions attached by donor countries to any development assistance funds, hampering the ability of South Governments to set priorities in their development programmes. This has detracted from the importance of international cooperation for development in the programmes of the international community, including the United Nations system;

(g) Imposition of non-tariff barriers to trade by the industrialized countries, blocking market access by non-traditional exports from the developing countries;

(h) Monopolistic control of technology patents by North countries and their transnational corporations and imposition of numerous barriers to the real transfer of technology;

(i) Policies encouraging "brain theft" from South countries, which dismantles or weakens human capital training programmes in underdeveloped countries;

(j) Inequality between developed and developing countries in their respective ability to generate scientific and technical knowledge and utilize that knowledge to support socio-economic development. The technology gap between developed and developing countries contributes substantially to the growing disparity between their income levels, which threatens to grow even wider if the developing countries do not manage to become actively involved in the development of new industries based on the application of science and technology;

(k) Financial liberalization, including speculative and volatile capital flows over which the developing countries have very little control because of the lack of adequate institutional mechanisms to address those processes, has generated considerable instability in international economic resources, with especially disastrous results for developing countries.

20. The list of obstacles is in no way exhaustive, but it does identify some of the areas that need urgent action by Governments and the international community for the full application of the right to development.

21. The Government of the Republic of Cuba is confident that human solidarity and social justice will prevail over the selfish and unjust concepts underpinning the current international economic order, which are aggravated by the neo-liberal theories imposed by the current process of globalization.

22. The holding of the South Summit in Havana made a modest contribution to the strengthening of South-South cooperation with the objective of promoting the full realization of the right to development by the peoples of this region.

23. North-South cooperation also needs an impetus. It is vital to restore North-South dialogue with two fundamental objectives: promoting sustained economic growth and sustainable development as the priorities of cooperation and correcting the imbalances in the operation of the international economic system, which places developing countries at a clear disadvantage in their relationship with developed countries.

24. The Millennium Declaration adopted by the Heads of State and Government at the recent Millennium Summit (General Assembly resolution 55/2) stressed the fundamental value of solidarity in international relations in the twenty-first century, affirming that global challenges must be managed in a way that distributes the costs and burdens fairly in accordance with basic principles of equity and social justice and that those who suffer, or who benefit least, deserve help from those who benefit most.

25. The future of all individuals and peoples on this planet depends to a great extent on finding solutions to the major challenges facing humanity today, in particular the eradication of poverty and the full enjoyment of the right to development.

26. Cuba reiterates its willingness to participate actively in the Open-ended Working Group on the Right to Development and hopes that the Working Group will make a significant contribution to the realization of one of the most important human rights, which unfortunately still does not receive the priority it deserves within the United Nations machinery for the promotion and protection of human rights.

C. Democratic People's Republic of Korea

[Original: English]
[7 June 2001]

27. The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has formulated and implemented national development policies oriented to give full play to *Chajusong* (independence) and creativity of people.

28. To realize the right to development, it is necessary to create international circumstances conducive to development through practical measures, including poverty alleviation, debt relief and withdrawal of sanctions.

29. In this regard, the United States of America must immediately lift all unreasonable sanctions, which hinder the realization of the rights of the developing countries to development.

D. Guatemala

[Original: Spanish]
[3 July 2001]

30. For many years, one of the main obstacles to development in Guatemala was the internal armed conflict, which lasted 36 years and ended only in 1996. In fact, that year marked the beginning of the process which is referred to in Guatemala as "national reconstruction". This is a process in which social as well as political and economic issues are addressed.

31. Although the Peace Agreements, some of which were signed as early as 1994, are primarily political in nature, they have been taken into account in the government agenda since 1996. As a result, progress has been made in a number of areas.

32. As the reconciliation process moves forward, an effort is now being made to overcome the privilege gap, especially by identifying existing inequalities. There are indications that the economy is stronger; strategies to improve competitiveness have been adopted, and investment in infrastructure is growing. Education has been targeted as a national objective, leading to a redoubling of efforts to eradicate illiteracy.

1. Action taken by the Government of Guatemala to combat poverty and promote development

33. In keeping with its aim of overcoming economic, social and institutional obstacles that prevent the population from enjoying decent living conditions, the Government of the Republic is promoting a poverty-reduction strategy that includes short-, medium- and long-term goals. Areas of action have been identified that call for both the State and society at large to work to reduce the magnitude of poverty, which affects the majority of the population.

34. It is important to bear in mind that fostering overall human development — at the individual and collective levels — is a fundamental part of a State's ability to ensure the well-being of its population. This is especially true in multi-ethnic countries such as Guatemala with human development indexes showing dramatic levels of poverty and social exclusion.

35. The Administration is determined to promote and strengthen sustainable human development and to consolidate peace. Hence, during 2000 it did the groundwork for transforming policy into action. Thus,

it developed a social policy matrix which reflects the commitments made by the Government in the framework of the Peace Agreements.

2. Strategic objectives of the Administration's plan for 2001

Poverty reduction

36. The aim is to improve the living standards of the most excluded groups by implementing, in a well-coordinated and participatory manner, comprehensive policies that will break the vicious circle of growth and impoverishment. Every effort will be made to promote:

(a) Sustained economic growth based on clear and consistent rules;

(b) Job creation, with pay based on productivity;

(c) Investment in human capital, so as to ensure that the population has access to basic social services such as health and education.

Human development

37. The aim is to achieve genuine human development by promoting tolerance, well-being and solidarity, thus providing opportunities for individuals and communities to better themselves in both material and cultural terms and in accordance with each group's particular needs. Efforts to expand opportunities will be geared to reducing social, ethnic and gender inequalities.

Citizen participation

38. The aim is to strengthen and expand mechanisms to promote citizen participation, ensuring that citizens are duly represented and have access to decision-making and that public officials are held accountable for their actions. Efforts will be made to improve communication between representatives and their constituents and to make it easier for people to form organizations to deal with their problems and needs and seek solutions jointly with State institutions.

Decentralization

39. Decentralization will gradually transfer certain decision-making and administrative functions, as well as resources, to levels of government that are closer to the population. At the same time, the capacity of the executive branch to provide guidance to local governments will be strengthened.

40. With decentralization as the basis for promoting increased grass-roots participation in solving community problems, short-, medium- and long-term programmes are being implemented. In the short term, the aim is to do the groundwork to make the process irreversible. A framework law on decentralization will be enacted to define the core elements of the process. In addition, a number of related laws will be updated and modernized (including the municipal code and the law on urban and rural development councils), in order to ensure that the process is consistent and comprehensive.

41. In the medium and long term, decentralization efforts will focus on the following components or areas of action:

(a) Policy decentralization: strengthening of local governments' management capacity;

(b) Administrative decentralization: transfer of powers to local governments;

(c) Fiscal decentralization: economic sustainability of local governments;

(d) Economic decentralization: modernization and growth of public and private sectors at the local level.

A culture of peace

42. The aim is to identify, recognize and respect the cultural diversity of Guatemalan society, fostering the harmony in which peaceful coexistence and positive cultural exchanges can take place.

43. In this strategy, priority is given to those areas of action that can have the greatest impact on poverty. Government action in the short and medium term will focus on three central elements, with a view to enhancing the levels of well-being and quality of life of all Guatemalans, especially the poorest and most excluded groups. The programmes will primarily target rural areas, where 75 per cent of the population lives.

44. These three central elements are:

(a) Economic growth with equity;

(b) Investment in human capital (education and health);

(c) Investment in physical infrastructure (drinking water, basic sanitation, rural roads, rural electrification).

45. These priority areas of action are aimed at meeting the international development objectives adopted by the United Nations General Assembly at the 1995 World Summit for Social Development and reaffirmed at the World Summit for Social Development and Beyond: achieving social development for all in a globalizing world, held in Geneva in 2000.

3. Other actions

46. To ensure that public resources have an impact on the living conditions of the target population, studies are being conducted in connection with the third phase of the integrated financial administration system (Sistema Integrado de Administración Financiera — SIAF), which is responsible for preparing and executing the national budget. The aim is to incorporate decentralized, autonomous and local entities into the system so as to enhance effectiveness and guarantee transparency in public administration.

47. Work has also begun on development of the national system of public investment (Sistema Nacional de Inversiones Públicas — SNIP), which is designed to evaluate all public investment initiatives so as to guarantee that the projects implemented will genuinely benefit the population.

48. In addition, in order to ensure the overall development, advancement and full participation of Guatemalan women, the Government has worked with women's organizations in civil society to reach consensus in outlining a national policy for the advancement and development of Guatemalan women and a plan for achieving equity. The result is a set of measures, programmes and projects that will be promoted by State institutions with a view to giving substance to the overall development of Guatemalan women on a truly equal footing with men.

49. The general objectives of the policy are as follows:

(a) To give priority to government action targeting the female population of all ages, ethnic groups and socio-political backgrounds;

(b) To adjust public policy, legislation, plans, programmes and projects so as to take into account the specific needs of women;

(c) To increase the participation of women at various levels of public administration and in positions where they can represent and participate in civil society, in dialogue with the State;

(d) To adjust the pertinent legal and budgetary frameworks and institutional mechanisms so as to ensure that they consistently include policies for the advancement and development of women.

50. As regards national policy on culture and sports, programmes will be aimed at consolidating a culture of peace on the basis of attitudes and values that are inherent to Guatemalan society. This will be accomplished by recognizing cultural diversity, including different world views and approaches to life and relationships, as well as ways of coping with and overcoming difficulties and working towards future-oriented development.

51. Likewise, peaceful coexistence and intercultural relations will be strengthened through sociocultural exchanges, respect for differences and appreciation of creativity, social organization, community values and bonds among people and between people and nature. This will take place in the context of long-term action to promote peace and sustainable human development.

52. In 2000, progress towards decentralization was achieved in a number of specific areas, laying the basis for the coming years:

(a) A preliminary national policy was developed;

(b) A general law on decentralization was drawn up and debated;

(c) Fifty-nine local governments were given responsibility for managing the single property tax (Impuesto Único sobre Inmueble — IUSI);

(d) A programme of work for the above-mentioned priority areas was completed, with implementation beginning throughout the country in January 2001;

(e) Substantial cooperation resources for the decentralization programme were obtained from the United Nations Development Programme, the Netherlands Organization for International

Development Cooperation and other international agencies;

(f) Discussions were initiated with various actors of civil society, which will be strengthened in coming years;

(g) A mayors' group was organized to coordinate decentralization efforts;

(h) Over 100 seminars were held throughout the country to encourage participation and discussion among all sectors;

(i) Support was provided for specific programmes carried out by local governments, at their request;

(j) Some ministries began implementing decentralization at the local level (e.g., health, education);

(k) A national radio campaign was conducted with messages to the public on the subject of decentralization and its benefits.

53. Among the major specific activities, mention may be made of the following.

54. The Secretariat for Devolution and Decentralization of the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare (MSPAS) was set up under agreement SPM592-200, whereby 52 local governments were selected to carry out action to devolve and decentralize the sector; at the same time, the Pilot Plan for decentralization of the health service was implemented in the department of Totonicapán.

55. In connection with the development of dialogue and national consensus in favour of educational reform, a System of Permanent Participation Councils was established to combine the forums for dialogue and consensus dealing with the subject of education at the local, municipal, departmental and national levels. The members of these Councils included representatives of teachers, parents, students and government authorities at the municipal, departmental and national levels and, where appropriate, representatives of indigenous organizations, the private sector, universities and other sectors of civil society connected with educational development.

56. Municipal and departmental councils have already been formed and work is in progress to set up local councils and the national council. To assist this process, support is being given to organization at the grass-roots level as a basis for the formation of local councils; at present there are a number of organizations operating at this level: 8,379 school boards and 3,438 education committees (COEDECAS) of the Programme for Educational Self-Management (PRONADE), which have been playing a vital role in supporting the provision of educational services, principally at the pre-primary and primary levels.

57. Efforts have also been made to modernize and decentralize the cultural sector. One of the most important achievements was the holding of the National Congress on Cultural Policy Guidelines, which formulated national cultural and sports policies. These policies have been publicized throughout the country and embody a broader concept of culture and intercultural relations; decentralization of the cultural sector has been achieved through community cultural workers.

58. Support for the process of decentralization and devolution of environmental management takes various forms: strengthening of executive branch institutions involved in the process, and empowerment of local governments, as the main management bodies at the local level, as well as the actual communities to take over ongoing management of their natural resources.

59. Within the Guatemalan Government, 22 departmental offices have been established which, together with the six regional offices of the National Commission for the Environment, support the process of decentralization. Similarly, at the municipal level, the local governments' environmental commissions have been activated and the post of environmental extension worker has been established. To ensure the sustainability of the process, training has been given to staff of the local offices on the following subjects: the Meso-American Biological Corridor, the national biodiversity strategy, environmental legislation and climate change, as well as financial management, the mass media and relations with the press.

60. With respect to the decentralization of the forestry administration, 65 municipal forest offices have been established and have begun work in the departments of Guatemala City, Escuintla, Alta Verapaz, Baja Verapaz, Jutiapa, Jalapa, Chimaltenango, Quiché, Quetzaltenango, Huhuetenango and Petén. Through these offices, advice has been provided for the

implementation of communal forest management plans, and publicly owned woodland has been looked after.

61. There has to be a trend towards decentralization of the management of protected areas through the National Council for Protected Areas (Consejo Nacional de Areas Protegidas — CONAP), which is working on the consolidation of the Guatemalan System of Protected Areas (Sistema Guatemalteco de Areas Protegidas), which involves government bodies and grass-roots organizations.

62. With respect to risk reduction and disaster prevention, it is hoped that the strengthening of regional, departmental, municipal and local coordination will make the population and the infrastructure less vulnerable to emergencies.

63. In conclusion, it should be noted that, in countries such as Guatemala, decentralization of services in general is an essential part of political, economic, social and human development. Thus, if the people themselves administer their resources and can participate and decide on the areas in which those resources are to be used, the Government and the State in general will be able to respond more effectively to the public demands of the population as a whole.

4. Future prospects

64. In the current context, a set of policies is in place to ensure that economic growth results in a reduction in social gaps and disparities, within the limits imposed by the natural system.

65. In pursuit of the proposed objectives, what is envisaged is a modern, efficient and devolved state with an autonomous system of justice, where privileges and impunity no longer exist. Reconciliation is essential in order to close a page of history marked by confrontation, exclusion, impunity and inequality, which are the main impediments to both human and social development.

E. Mexico

[Original: Spanish]
[9 July 2001]

66. The present administration of the Government of Mexico is fully committed to the right to development and sees a need to promote international and national policies which create an environment conducive to the implementation of that right.

67. International cooperation is essential for the formulation of appropriate development policies. In that context, it is imperative for all nations to build bridges on the basis of democracy, freedom and solidarity leading us to a shared future in which those who have been excluded from development are brought into the process to which they are entitled.

68. The Government of Mexico considers that the international agenda should envisage at least five goals: greater and more effective participation by developing countries in international economic decision-making; a truly open multilateral trade system reflecting the development needs of all nations; a new international financial architecture releasing resources for productive investment; an effective prevention and response capacity to deal with international financial crises; and sustainable and integrated worldwide economic growth.

69. One noteworthy event was the launching of a regional and sustainable development plan known as the Plan Puebla Panamá, resulting from recognition that the disparities between the south/south-east of Mexico and the rest of the country have increased and that the problems afflicting the region have spread to the countries of Central America. A joint development effort between central America and that region of Mexico, within a framework that respects the need for cooperation, understanding and consensus, is essential in order to improve the quality of life of the people of the region.

70. The objective of the Plan is the immediate correction of the distortions that have adversely affected Central America so as to make a start on reversing the long-standing downward trend and thus give its inhabitants access to a better quality of life. To that end, it proposes a new model of regional development starting from the premise that development is not development unless it involves the development of people, which envisages new public human development policies (giving special attention to the overall development of indigenous communities and peoples), poverty relief and promotion of productive investment and development, strategic investment in infrastructure so that the region can communicate more effectively and take advantage of the potential offered by Mexico's treaties on free trade,

a new price and tariff policy for goods and services produced by the public sector and programmes to ensure the environmental sustainability of economic growth.

71. Coordinated action among the Governments of the countries of Central America and Mexico will enhance and multiply their opportunities to take better collective advantage of their new opportunities, to face their challenges and, while respecting the sovereign decisions of each State, to impart a new economic dynamism to the region.

72. The international aspect of the Plan Puebla Panamá will have to be fine-tuned on the basis of appropriate consultations with the Governments of the countries of the region and adoption of the required agreements and commitments. The Plan will be able to receive contributions from multinational and multilateral bodies with an interest in the region.

73. The Plan will thus be, both within Mexico and in Central America, a mechanism for ongoing and permanent consultations to develop an overall long-term regional strategy with the participation of indigenous communities, peoples, citizens' organizations, entrepreneurs and the different levels of government. It will consistently respect the freedom of the regions and entities to define their own destiny.

74. Within the purely national sphere, on 29 May 2001 President Vicente Fox introduced the National Development Plan 2001-2006, which acknowledges the individual as the central subject of development and was prepared on the basis of wide-ranging public consultations, so as to cover all social needs.

75. The strategies and guidelines for social policy set out in the National Development Plan include initiatives to reverse the causes of extreme poverty in the shortest possible time and will be sustainable in the long term; their basic objective is to help to meet the immediate needs of the marginal population and at the same time to support it, within a context of empowerment, so as to expedite its incorporation in productive life, breaking the vicious and inter-generational circle of poverty.

76. The country's social development policy is one of the priorities of the Government of Mexico and will seek to provide equal opportunities for all citizens. A Commission for Social and Human Development has been set up and five key elements for the development policy have been defined: to satisfy at least the minimum requirement of Mexicans with respect to food, housing and education; to apply a measure of equity in all government policies; to focus on the population living in extreme poverty, particularly indigenous peoples; to promote social cohesion and community spirit; and to protect the environment.

77. In that sense, government policy is designed to reduce the disparity between the poorest and the richest. The main requirement of the poorest people is to be able to find work and receive an education in order to achieve a lasting improvement in their living conditions. During 2001, it is envisaged that the proportion of public expenditure earmarked for social development will show a real increase of 4.7 per cent compared with the previous year. In 2001, this amount will represent 61.2 per cent of overall allocable expenditure and 9.2 per cent of the country's gross domestic product.

78. The Government has various programmes to combat poverty, prominent among them being the Education, Health and Food Programme (PROGRESA) and the National Programme for Microregions.

79. PROGRESA was designed to address the various causes of poverty through an overall, ongoing and long-term approach, with the objective of reaching all regions with concentrations of families living in extreme poverty so as to improve their conditions with respect to food, health and education, particularly as regards women and children. The objective of PROGRESA is to reach 750,000 more families in 2001, bringing the total coverage to 3.2 million families.

80. It is noteworthy that the approach of PROGRESA is to provide structural assistance rather than welfare. Welfare assistance does not produce lasting results with an impact on the causes that perpetuate poverty; nor does it promote self-help or empower the recipients. PROGRESA seeks above all to enhance the basic abilities of the individual, reinforcing the benefits of his or her own efforts.

81. Similarly, PROGRESA strives to achieve gender equality in the communities where it works by channelling all financial aid to the mothers of families.

82. The objective of the National Programme for Microregions is to address, initially, 250 microregions, in other words 5.5 million Mexicans, of whom 3.4 million are members of indigenous populations. The

intention is to reach the most marginalized municipalities with the objective of overcoming their poverty and promoting their all-round development, focusing efforts and resources for that purpose in a coordinated manner between the three branches of government, with the participation of civil society.

83. Lastly, it is important to emphasize that Mexico's social development policy invariably assumes the support of all citizens, men and women alike, who are empowered to participate in the design, implementation, monitoring and social control of activities, so that optimum use is made of resources.